



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS
VETERANS SERVICES STRATEGIC PLAN
ADVISORY COMMITTEE



Official Minutes of the Veterans Services Strategic Plan Advisory Committee

Meeting Date and Time: October 17, 2014 @ 9:00 a.m.
Meeting Location: Department of Administration
Conference Room B, One Capitol Hill,
Providence, Rhode Island 02908

MEMBERS PRESENT	MEMBERS ABSENT
Sandra Powell, Co-Chair, Director, Department of Human Services	Kevin M. Flynn, Associate Director, Division of Planning
Kim Ripoli, Co-Chair, Associate Director, Division of Veterans Affairs	Eva Mancuso, Chair, Rhode Island Board Of Education
Corinna Roy, on behalf of Director Craig Stenning, Department of Behavioral Health, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals	Peter Kilmartin, Attorney General, Department of the Attorney General
Leonard Green, on behalf of Director Michael Fine, M.D., Department of Health	
Paula Parker, Assistant Director, Division of Elderly Affairs	
Paul McGreevey, Director, Department of Business Regulation	
James White and Sue Chomka, on behalf of Director Charles Fogarty, Department of Labor and Training	
Vic Howard, on behalf of Executive Director Marcel Valois, Commerce RI	
Maureen Ewing and Raina Smith, on behalf Secretary of State A. Ralph Mollis	
LTC Ken Niles and SGM (ret.) Chuck O'Connor, on behalf of The Adjutant General, MG Kevin McBride	

1. Call to Order

Sandra M. Powell, Director, Department of Human Services, and co-chair of the Veterans Services Strategic Plan Committee (VSSP), called the meeting to order the VSSP meeting on October 17, 2014, at 9:10 a.m. After brief introductions, Director Powell noted that the Attorney General's representative was in court and was not able to attend but will be present for future

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meetings. Similarly, Eva Mancuso, chair of the Rhode Island Board of Education, contacted Director Powell to let her know that she was out of town but is looking forward to the Board of Education's participation on the committee.

2. Discussion on VSSP Legislation

Director Powell provided an overview of R.I. Gen. Laws §§ 30-17.1-8 through 30-17.1-12, the legislation that set up the committee and its charge to create a strategic plan to better support the needs of Veterans. As stated in the legislation, the General Assembly found that

there is a gap in resources and information necessary to effectively support and address the needs of veterans and our state agencies must work together more effectively to collaborate, coordinate, leverage and ultimately enhance existing state, federal and private veterans' services to meet and exceed the needs and expectations of Rhode Island's veterans and their families.

She explained that the VSSP committee was set up to develop, maintain, and annually update a five-year statewide strategic plan, with goals and measurable outcomes to ensure that all state agencies deliver comprehensive services and supports for Veterans and their families. Among the issues that the General Assembly wants to see addressed include:

- (1) Access to benefits;
- (2) Employment opportunities;
- (3) Veteran-owned small business growth;
- (4) Educational attainment;
- (5) Job skills training;
- (6) Behavioral health;
- (7) Long-term health care options;
- (8) Criminal justice issues; and
- (9) Homelessness.

Director Powell noted that in each subsequent meeting the committee will focus on two or three of these subject areas for recommendations to the strategic plan. In addition, she recommended inviting other groups and members of the community who have specific expertise to help educate the committee.

3. Strategic Goals

Director Powell reviewed the goals for the VSSP set forth in the legislation. They include:

- (1) Be based upon comprehensive data gained through open and transparent engagement of veterans' stakeholders;
- (2) Produce veteran-centric policies and procedures informed by forward looking planning;
- (3) Realistically assess resource adequacy and capabilities delivered;
- (4) Ensure that existing resources are aligned to mission critical objectives;
- (5) Complement, as well as leverage, existing US Veterans' Administration programs and best practices;
- (6) Foster state, federal and private partnerships that seamlessly deliver exceptional services to the state's veteran population; and
- (7) More effectively coordinate the delivery of veterans' services to all current and future veterans in Rhode Island.

She then discussed the need to create a comprehensive network in line with a “no wrong door” policy so that a Veteran who accesses a benefit, program, or service at one agency can be referred to others as needed throughout state government or within the nonprofit community.

4. Agency Roundtable

The committee members then held a roundtable to discuss their agencies and some initial thoughts on what their agency currently provides or could provide to Veterans.

Co-Chair and Associate Director of Veterans Affairs Kim Ripoli provided an overview of the Division of Veterans Affairs and discussed her experience working on behalf of Veterans at the Pentagon on behalf of the Secretary of the Navy.

Sue Chomka from DLT noted that her agency has metrics for employment available that will be helpful to establishing baselines. James White, Veterans Services Coordinator at the Department of Labor and Training (DLT) provided an overview of the services DLT offers for Veterans, including a Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program Specialists and Local Veterans' Employment Representatives at the netWORKri centers, which are located throughout the state. They attempt to match jobseekers and employers through quality employment programs and services. For those transitioning from the military or who once served in the armed forces, these designated veteran employment counselors are prepared to assist veterans and eligible spouses in finding a new career. Mr. White noted that translating military service and experience into licensing credentials remains an issue.

Paul McGreevey, director of the Department of Business Regulation (DBR), mentioned that DBR does not provide any specific services geared towards Veterans but has significant expertise in insurance, securities, and banking that could be leveraged to provide financial literacy programs for Veterans and their Families.

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Paula Parker of the Division of Elderly Affairs (DEA), discussed her agency's community-based services for elders, some of which supplement services that Veterans receive from the VA. She noted that her agency is only bound by age in terms of the eligibility for its services, but has been working on specific community-based programming for Veterans.

Two representatives from the Office of the Secretary of State, Maureen Ewing and Raina Smith, stated that there are no programs set up solely for Veterans but their office does provide numerous resources for Rhode Islanders looking to start their own businesses, including one-on-one counseling and workshops. They recommended that these programs could be of great benefit to Veterans who are looking for assistance setting up a business and hope to have a workshop or a series of workshops that assist to Veterans looking to become entrepreneurs.

Leonard Green, the Department of Health's Deputy Director, discussed the consideration given to Veterans on the cost of vital records maintained by his agency. He also highlighted the data that DOH collects each year from its surveys on the health of the state's population. He recommended that the committee utilize this resource to gather data important around the services that are or should be provided to Veterans. He mentioned the important role housing plays in the panoply of social determinants for health and thought it was worth exploring whether Veterans are over-represented in the recent surge in opiate overdose cases.

Corinna Roy of the Department of Behavioral Health, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals discussed her agency's work with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the Rhode Island District Court's Veterans Treatment Court to direct eligible Veterans into support and treatment plans to divert offenders away from incarceration while providing appropriate rehabilitative alternatives. She also noted that the need to have TRICARE available to reimburse more providers.

LTC Ken Niles of the Rhode Island National Guard highlighted the need to strengthen the state's predatory lending laws to align it with the priorities of the Department of Defense. In addition, he stated that RING maintains a robust Family Assistance Center that provides services for National Guardsman and many reservists and retirees.

Chuck O'Connor, the Transition Assistance Advisor at the Rhode Island National Guard, provides referral services and advocacy for all Veterans. He has seen a need to fill the skills gap that exists for those getting out of the service and the current jobs available. He also talked about the need for a resource center for Veterans and outreach workers.

Vic Howard of Commerce RI noted that his agency works with public, private and non-profit partners to promote the State's long-term economic health and prosperity by providing services to businesses, such as procurement and technical assistance. He discussed how tracks Commerce RI tracks what it does in terms of counseling and companies that it assists.

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5. Items for Action

The committee agreed on three action items for the next VSSP meeting.

First, each agency will summarize existing resources and/or programs that it provides for Veterans or could be utilized by Veterans. In addition, gaps in programs or services, if any, should be considered and identified.

Second, the committee seeks information on “who is a Veteran” for purposes of state benefit and program eligibility and for the strategic plan generally. If an agency uses a definition of Veteran for its programs or services, Director Powell asked that this information be forwarded to Mike Jolin at the Department of Human Services so that it can be organized and disseminated for further discussion and decision. James White of DLT also noted that it is important to identify the appropriate characterization of separation when delineating the level of benefits and services made available.

Third, the enabling legislation for the VSSP committee establishes a subcommittee to be made up of no less than five Veterans who represent different interests and points of view to provide input to the main VSSP committee. As such, the members of the committee are encouraged to think about any Veterans that the agency interacts with who may be interested in participating on the subcommittee.

Dates and times for the next meeting were proposed as follows:

Thursday, November 6, 2014, 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.
Thursday, December 4, 2014, 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.
Thursday, January 8, 2015, 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.
Thursday, January 29, 2015, 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.
Thursday, February 19, 2015, 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.
Thursday, March 12, 2015, 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

6. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 10:38 a.m.